

VZCZCXRO2526
PP RUEHDBU RUEHIK RUEHPOD RUEHPW RUEHSL RUEHYG
DE RUEHBUL #2939/01 2661426
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 231426Z SEP 09
FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1643
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE
RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE
RUEABND/DEA HQS WASHINGTON DC
RUEHRC/USDA FAS WASHDC
RHMFIUU/HQ USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 002939

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SRAP, SCA/FO, SCA/RA, SCA/A, AND INL/AP
DEPT PASS FOR AID/ASIA SCAA DRAY
DEPT PASS USDA FOR FAS MICHNER
CENTCOM FOR USFOR-A AND CSTC-A

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [EAD](#) [EAGR](#) [ECON](#) [SNAR](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: AGRICULTURE RAPID RESPONSE PROGRAM IN HELMAND PROVINCE
MAKING PROGRESS IN SPITE OF CHALLENGES

Ref: Kabul 2383

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) USAIDQs agricultural rapid rmi endorsed the plan and suggested a methodology to build Afghan Government capacity by seconding new Ministry extension agents to AVIPA PLUS to receive on-the-ground training, and identified a salary mechanism to encourage staff to work in these difficult ation in the District Delivery program, a parallel U.S.-GIROA effort to deliver integrated governance packages to recently secured and/or strategic districts (reftel). Nawa is one of six pilot districts selected for this program. Septel will address this program.)

¶4. (SBU) Upon receiving MAIL/Kabul approval, USAID and USMC facilitated a shura with the Nawa District Governor (DG) to introduce IRD and the AVIPA PLUS program and discuss next steps towards identifying projects and beneficiaries. Since then, in close cooperation with the Afghan government and US and UK military, three additional districts (Nahr-e Saraj, Nad-e Ali and Garmsir) in Helmand were selected, and agreement was reached for USG to support over 80% of the areas under Helmand Governor MangalQs QFood Zone Program.

FACTORS COMPLICATING ROLLOUT

KABUL 00002939 002 OF 002

¶5. (SBU) After USAID-IRD arrived in Lashkar Gah on July 9, all civilian flights to the region were suspended and ground movements restricted from July 12 to August 3, effectively halting all civilian passage into and out of Helmand. The mobile phone network does not extend into the districts and only operates within Lashkar Gah during the day, with frequent disruptions. In addition, during this period all resources were focused on maintaining security for national elections on August 20. Despite these obstacles, the program has successfully established relationships with the PRT, USMC, TFH, and Afghan provincial authorities, and as of August 17 had recruited 67 Afghans in Lashkar Gah.

¶6. (SBU) Since USAIDQs arrival, several underlying factors that will directly affect AVIPA PLUS rollout have emerged: travel between Lashkar Gah and the districts is largely non-permissive; the Nawa

District Governor (DG) lives within the USMC base for security reasons; and MAIL has limited ability to provide district-level support. USAID identified highly-qualified Afghan agricultural experts but many continue to refuse to leave the security of Lashkar Gah to return to their home districts. Agricultural projects must be identified early to ensure alignment with planting seasons.

¶17. (SBU) AVIPA PLUS is dependent on freedom of movement so that Afghan officials can meet openly with the people, and entrepreneurs and farmers can access and move agricultural goods. In Nawa, citizens must visit the USMC base if they wish to meet with the District Governor; participation at public shuras is limited to those willing to be seen visiting the base. Moreover, extension agents do not feel secure enough to travel to farms to provide technical assistance. These conditions in Nawa are not unique in Helmand.

¶18. (SBU) While the Agricultural Ministry supports AVIPA PLUS, its dependence on centralized decision-making could significantly slow implementation. Additionally, the Ministry's capacity to provide local level support is limited; the 600 extension agents the Ministry has recently hired have not yet deployed, and the acting Helmand Department of Agriculture director receives little support from Kabul and suffers from low staffing levels and poor capacity of existing staff. Significant personnel changes are expected in Helmand after the elections and bureaucratic infighting among different local GIROA departments leaves decision-making hostage to personalities.

¶19. (SBU) Identifying and addressing such constraints will be key to AVIPA PLUS's success, and our efforts to move this program forward must include US and coalition partners. The USG is working with Task Force Helmand and the USMC at both the headquarters and district levels to identify how best to utilize AVIPA PLUS to achieve greater stability in the cleared areas. This includes deciding which communities to work with and addressing how to move agricultural goods between population centers.

¶10. (SBU) Despite these constraints, three additional districts in Helmand (Garmsir, Nad-e Ali and Nahr-e Saraj) were selected for inclusion in the program in close cooperation with the Afghan government, Task Force Helmand, USMC, and Lashkar Gah PRT. Cash-for-work projects have begun in Lashkar Gah, with additional projects in Nawa slated to begin after Eid, providing jobs for at least 220 laborers. An Afghan-led review committee in the Nawa District Governor's Office formed to receive and review grant applications. Seventy-seven grants, valued at \$995,000 and potentially benefitting nearly 1,600 Afghan farmers and small business owners, have been received to date and are under review. In addition, USG agreed to support over 80% of the areas under Helmand Governor Mangal's QFood Zone Program. Initial projects are employing over 100 day laborers to graft 155,000 tree saplings and construct vineyard trellises to produce high-value fruits such as apricots and plums in five key agricultural districts.

¶11. (SBU) Understanding how to work in the districts and which activities to support under AVIPA PLUS activities is still a work in progress and is heavily dependent on the reality and perception of security for beneficiaries, host country officials and implementing partners.

EIKENBERRY